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# UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAVEN

ALUMNI MAGAZINE • ISSUE 04 • FALL 2019

# THE CHARGER CHALLENGE





## Looking Back

# A University on a Hill

The institution that would become the University of New Haven was founded in 1920 as a night school on the Yale Campus to meet the myriad business and engineering needs of the local economy. In 1960, it purchased the New Haven County Home for Orphans and the Gatehouse (pictured here) as its first campus buildings overlooking the region of West Haven, Connecticut that it had helped to transform for nearly half a century.







# Celebrating What it Takes to be a Charger

The spotlights featured in this special campaign edition of the *University of New Haven Alumni Magazine* showcase something fundamental that our students, faculty, alumni, and friends have in common: selflessness and a desire to give back to the world for the opportunities given to them. The Charger Challenge was inspired by individuals like these who have committed themselves to continuing an incredible momentum into a future that beckons with possibility and the promise of imagination, innovation, and impact.



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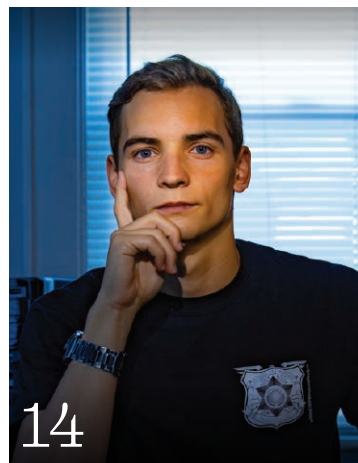
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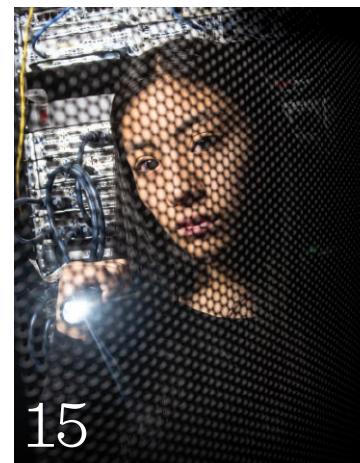
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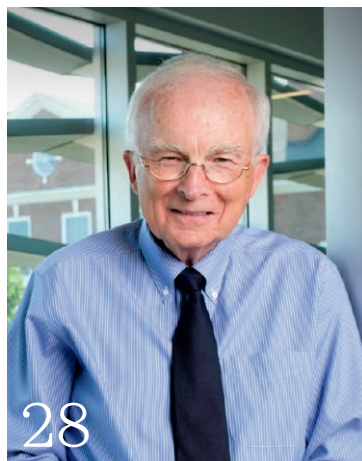
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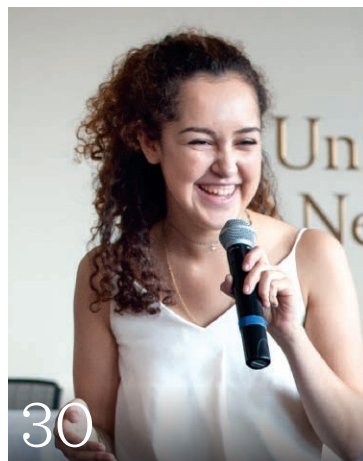
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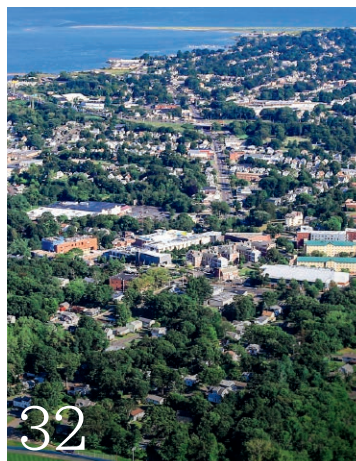
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## UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAVEN

ALUMNI MAGAZINE • ISSUE 04 • FALL 2019

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# Welcoming the Next Century



**A**s I enter my sixteenth year as president of the University of New Haven and think back on the entirety of my tenure, what stands out to me the most is the character of the individuals who make up our University community — the students, faculty, alumni, and friends whose gratitude and generosity have helped make the University the fine institution that it is today and who inspire and sustain the incredible momentum of The Charger Challenge.

The societal challenges we face require the power of many, not just one or a few, forward-thinking and bold individuals. I am proud that we as a University have already done so much to advance research and solutions in some of the most critical areas — such as health sciences, cybersecurity, and environmental science — and I eagerly anticipate our continued success in these and other areas of need. I am confident

that the impressive individuals who are a part of the University family will continue to be some of the most talented and best-equipped change agents today, tomorrow, and well into the future.

In this special campaign edition of the *University of New Haven Alumni Magazine*, we profile individuals who represent the many different faces that comprise our community. Instead of touting their many accomplishments second-hand, we have endeavored to allow these inspiring individuals to express, in their own words, what exhilarates them; what they care about most; and the impact that they hope to make on those around them.

***The societal challenges we face require the power of many, not just one or a few, forward-thinking and bold individuals. I am proud that we as a University have already done so much to advance research and solutions in some of the most critical areas ... and I eagerly anticipate our continued success in these and other areas of need.***

You will meet such people as an adjunct professor and alumna pursuing her thesis work by teaching environmental science to primary school children living on Bahamian and other Caribbean islands, building a future generation of adults who will fight to protect the environment; two high school students who spent the better part of their summer at the University's GenCyber Academy, experiencing what it takes to enter the field of cybersecurity and who now have their eyes set on attending the University of New Haven to pursue this field of study; two longstanding University benefactors who made possible our new innovation center which will serve as a physical manifestation of The Charger Challenge and provide students with a cutting-edge space to collaborate and test creative, entrepreneurial ideas; a first-generation college student who — after beginning her freshman year with little confidence that she could make a difference — now serves as class president and a senate member of the Undergraduate Student Government Association, guiding discussions on shaping the future not only of the University of New Haven, but also of higher education overall; and, our recently appointed athletic director whose dedication to improving our competitive edge and facilitating a move to Division I athletics has already helped us to make important strides.

I greatly admire these individuals who are addressing such important issues head on with bold and strategic efforts to enact meaningful change in the world.

What began 100 years ago as a night school using rented space on the Yale campus — then, 40 years later, became a small university on a hill in West Haven, Connecticut — has grown into an expansive, thriving campus built for decades to come. We now welcome, with open arms, the next century of the University of New Haven — one I believe will be our best yet.

With best wishes,

Steven H. Kaplan, Ph.D.  
President



## The Charger Challenge: By the Numbers

# 2016

THE CHARGER CHALLENGE:  
THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE  
UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAVEN  
LAUNCHED PUBLICLY

## \$100 MILLION CAMPAIGN GOAL SET

# 19,799 DONORS

## 100 GIFTS OF \$100,000 OR MORE

## \$30.4 MILLION IN FEDERAL AND STATE GRANTS AND CONTRACTS DURING THE CAMPAIGN

## 27 GIFTS OF AT LEAST \$1 MILLION

## 103 NEW ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIPS CREATED

# GOAL EXCEEDED

18 MONTHS AHEAD OF THE UNIVERSITY'S CENTENNIAL

CAMPAIGN GOAL RESET TO

## \$120 MILLION BY 2020

WILL FOCUS ON ATTRACTING  
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES  
FOR ATHLETICS, CYBER-  
SECURITY, AND THE NEW  
SCHOOL OF HEALTH SCIENCES

### BOARD OF GOVERNORS

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THE CHARGER  
CHALLENGE

#### SHAPING THE NEXT 100 YEARS

The Charger Challenge: The Campaign for the University of New Haven embodies the University's mission since its founding — innovation, creativity, and social impact — and the promise to educate an enterprising generation of students eager to explore new ways of thinking, doing, and problem-solving.

Visit [newhaven.edu/chargerchallenge](http://newhaven.edu/chargerchallenge) to learn more about The Charger Challenge or to make a gift of any size.



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## PASSION PROJECTS

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Arnold Gold/New Haven Register





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*Whenever I set out to build something new, I remind myself that I'm going to fail. A lot. I'll start with a small prototype, and it won't turn out quite right. Then I'll build another version, and that one will be just OK. I'll improve on the design of the second iteration, and I still won't be satisfied. It is such a crazy thing to see something you've worked on for so long suddenly work exactly like you envisioned it would. It's the best feeling in the world. That's what I keep in the back of my mind when I'm at the point where I feel like all I've done is fail. I know it's going to be worth it.*

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## Matthew Sheehy '19

● **Matthew Sheehy '19**, a former Kauffman Scholarship recipient and graduate of the University of New Haven's Mechanical Engineering Program, currently works with periscopes, masts, and antennas at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center (NUWC) in Newport, Rhode Island. He is also co-founder of Modernized Startups, a company that offers 3D printing services for business advertising. Sheehy — pictured here with a hovercraft he built as a class project — expressed this creative streak throughout his time at the University by building and prototyping a variety of products, including motorized longboards, quadcopters, hovercrafts, and jet scooters.





## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

“  
*After a field trip, one student told me that although touching a starfish was something he'd been very afraid to do, it was also his favorite memory. He was so proud of himself for conquering his fear. Getting kids outside and comfortable with exploring nature is a huge part of why I do this. Kids who grow up loving nature become adults who will fight to protect our environment.*

Olivia Walton '19





♦ **Olivia Walton '19 M.S.**, who earned a bachelor's degree in natural resources from Cornell University, currently teaches as an adjunct professor at the University of New Haven while completing her master's degree in environmental science. Walton is the first University student to earn a Switzer Environmental Fellowship from the Robert and Patricia Switzer Foundation, a research award granted to only 20 emerging environmental leaders in the nation. The grant enabled Walton, a native of St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands, to expand her thesis research on developing and assessing conservation education approaches for primary school children living on Bahamian and other Caribbean islands.



# ENGINEERS WITHOUT BORDERS

“

*I want to show people the power in seeing possibility as something that we can create. I truly believe that the number of ways in which we can help those most in need, in our own communities and around the world, are endless.*

## Skyler Szerszen '21

• **Skyler Szerszen '21**, a mechanical engineering major and president for the University of New Haven's chapter of Engineers Without Borders (EWB), is working with fellow club members to advance clean water solutions in rural Ecuador by creating and testing biosand filters. Once they receive approval from the national offices of EWB-USA in 2020, students will travel to Ecuador to teach local community leaders how to construct the filters.

Photo by Len Rubenstein



“

*I want to excel as an individual, but more so I feel a responsibility to advance the field overall. I believe that those of us who enter the world of paramedicine all have, deep down, a calling to make the world a better place. Our job isn't all about just emergencies—we become members of a person's community and support public-health initiatives. We're a new breed of first responder. The profession is an honor.*

## Nicholas Amato '20

● **Nicholas Amato '20**, a paramedicine major in the University of New Haven's newly established School of Health Sciences, studied abroad in Prato, Italy, at the University's Tuscany campus. As part of this program, he collaborated with chief physicians and staff at Nuovo Ospedale di Prato, learning the differences and similarities between U.S. and Italian health care delivery systems and styles of care. Amato applied his clinical knowledge by managing and treating patients both prehospital and in the emergency room.



## A NEW FACE

# Q&A

## Sheahon Zenger, Ph.D.

**Sheahon Zenger, Ph.D.**, was hired as the University of New Haven's new athletic director in September 2019, bringing with him over 25 years of experience. Most recently, Dr. Zenger served as an assistant to the chancellor and as an adviser to the director of athletics at Texas Christian University. From 2011 to 2018, he was director of athletics for the University of Kansas. Dr. Zenger has also served as director of athletics for Illinois State University and worked in athletics administration and coaching at Kansas State, the University of Wyoming, the University of South Florida, and Drake University.

### Why the University of New Haven?

I've found that the best experiences in my life have been at institutions where there's incredible growth, excitement, and dedication, and this University is on fire.

### What is one of your proudest achievements?

Both of my parents were professors. They supported my dream to go into coaching as long as I also pursued my academic interests. I worked hard and earned both bachelor's and master's degrees as well as a doctorate. I'm proud that I'm able to combine my passion for leading students both on the field and in the classroom.

### Can you tell us more about your dual passion for sports as well as for higher learning?

I believe all administrators should be in the classroom from time to time. A university is, by definition, a community

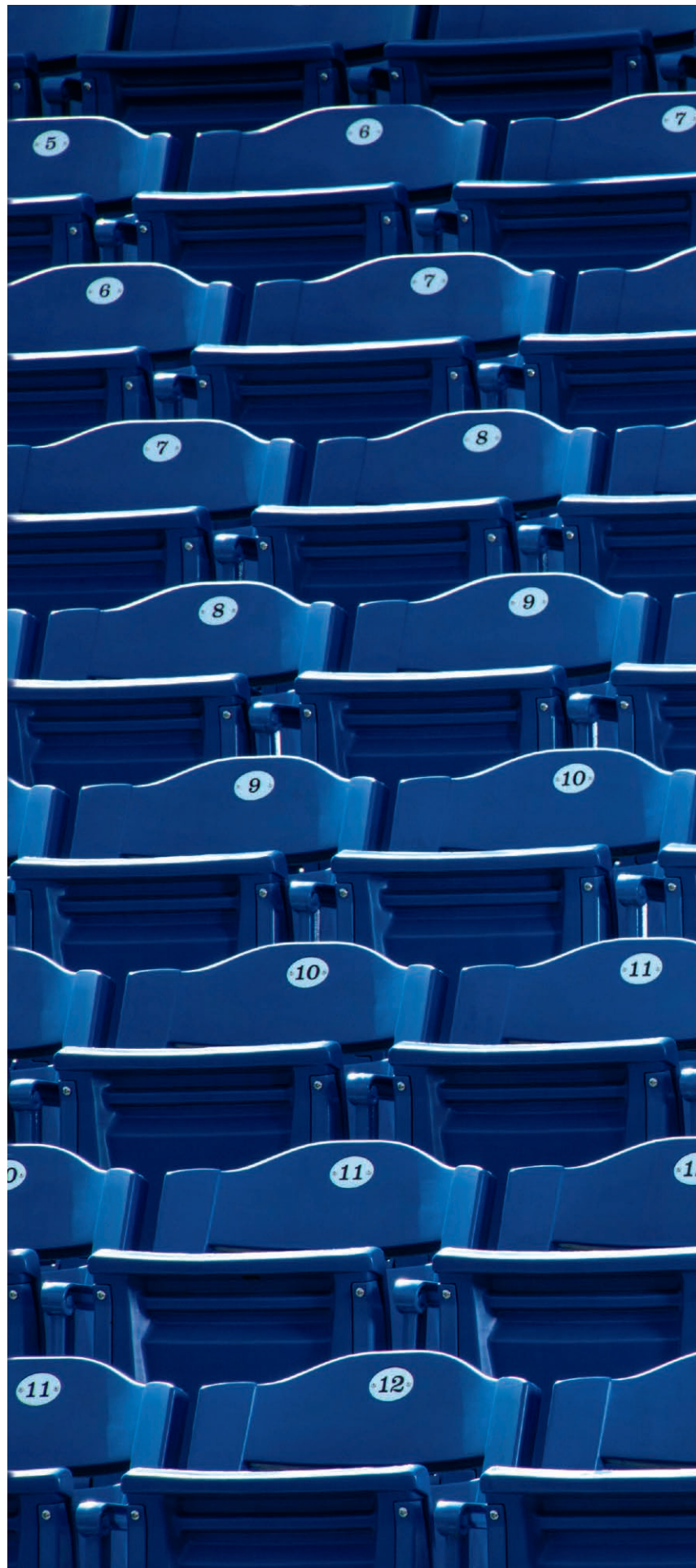
of scholars. I'm currently teaching an honors English literature seminar with President Kaplan. I don't know if it makes me old school or new school, but when I engage in scholarship, whether teaching or research, it makes me feel more a part of the campus family.

### What do you look forward to most in your new role at the University?

I'm excited to help the University's athletics excel at a greater level, which includes exploring a potential move into Division I, as well as fundraising, creating student leadership, and developing strategies for all athletic and recreational programs.

### The final word?

Our goal in the athletics department is to continue the upward trajectory that the University is already on — to catch up to the rest of campus, not to surpass it. The growth of this institution has been incredible, and I'm honored that I can be a part of it. ■









# SPECIAL AGENT

“

*I taught myself to code when I was eight years old. Later, I scraped together whatever money I made from part-time jobs and bought tools and tech to continue learning new programming languages. I even founded a cybersecurity club at my high school. Since then, I've placed in hackathons and have had the chance to participate in Carnegie Mellon's PicoCTF hacking contest. Cybersecurity is my passion. I was challenged by the University's GenCyber Academy and feel that it is my duty to give back to the field.*

## Matt London

Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School  
Scotch Plains, New Jersey

Photo by Don Hamerman

• **Matt London** and **Yamilett Hernandez** (right) have both participated in the University of New Haven's GenCyber Agent Academy, a program designed for high school students that is supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Security Agency (NSA). Hosted by the University's Tagliatela College of Engineering, the camp is



“

*The different exercises we did at the GenCyber Academy brought what we were learning to life. I have always been fascinated by anything to do with forensics, whether it involves sitting behind a computer or investigating a crime scene in the field. I am interested in everything from robotics to network defense to different methods of hacking. In the future, I want to become an FBI agent. I have my heart set on helping people through this work.*

**Yamilett  
Hernandez**

Hill Regional Career High School  
New Haven, Connecticut

a comprehensive one-week, hands-on, intensive program designed not only to teach participants about cybersecurity, but also to have a long-term effect on their career goals and aspirations. It is the first camp of its kind in Connecticut and is open to 20 male and 20 female high school students throughout the country at no cost for participants.



# MODEL UNITED NATIONS

## Olivia Bissanti '21

Olivia Bissanti '21 is a three-time delegate for the University of New Haven's Model United Nations (MUN). Inspired by this experience, Bissanti is in the process of becoming a double major in political science and psychology and also serves as the University's fall 2019 Model G20 delegate at American University Washington, D.C.





# A Good Global Citizen

"My mom always told me that the worst thing you can do is sit back and let school go by without getting involved."

**Olivia Bissanti '21** has certainly taken her mother's advice to heart during her time at the University of New Haven. The junior will soon travel overseas to negotiate global policies as the head delegate of the University's Germany Model United Nations (MUN) team. On campus, Bissanti has expanded her leadership skills as director of the ChargerMUN high school conference and contributed to research on juvenile justice reform and policy as an intern at the University's Tow Youth Justice Institute, part of the Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences. And she's just getting started.

"Living in the United States, it's very easy to get swept up in only those issues that affect our nation

directly," says Bissanti. "Through MUN, we're able to consider issues like climate change and human rights that affect people throughout the world. Learning about these issues is a first step to creating positive solutions. It makes me a good global citizen, and I think that's important for everyone."

Bissanti would give incoming students the same advice that her mother gave her. "College is what you make out of it. Your experiences will stand out more than your transcript," she says. "When you interview for a job, the most important thing you can have is stories — examples of how you've been shaped as a person and how you can contribute to the greater good. Look for things that interest you and harness that passion into opportunities to make your education as hands-on as possible." ■



## CHANGE AGENTS

“

*Lois and I are immensely proud to be a part of the University of New Haven family. It has been an enriching experience for us to support an institution that does so much for its students who, in turn, work so diligently to pursue their passions and grow into their full potential. That's why we give back as much as we do. We want to give the next generation the same opportunity to achieve their own dreams and change the world. We want the University to continue to be an institution that truly changes lives — one that will shine even more brightly in its second century than it has in its first.*

**Samuel S. Bergami, Jr.  
EMBA '85, HON '02, and  
Lois Bergami**

♦ **Samuel S. Bergami, Jr. EMBA '85, HON '02**, member of the University of New Haven Board of Governors, and his wife, **Lois Bergami**, generously funded the newly envisioned Bergami Center for Science, Technology, and Innovation. Currently under construction at the heart of the University's campus, the facility is scheduled to open in early 2020.







## Q&A

### Alice Yi '22

**Alice Yi '22** is pursuing a bachelor's degree in health sciences with a premedical studies designation at the University of New Haven. She also participates in the Pre-Health Professions Scholars Program and the Honors Program. Yi is a 2019 McHale Fellow, selected as one of three students — of a group of 38 — from the University's Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) program in recognition of her outstanding research work. SURF enables undergraduates to develop a proposal for a research project, conduct it while working closely with a faculty member, and present their findings to the campus community. Yi is currently conducting research in cervical cancer.

#### Tell us the basics.

I was born and raised in Guam. Growing up on the island was incredible, but it was always my goal to attend college in the Northeast. I love expansive thinking, open-mindedness, and the process of getting a better understanding of the world. I don't think that's possible without seeking out new experiences.

#### What drew you to Connecticut?

I never actually visited the University. The first time I set foot on campus was for orientation. I always wanted to work in the medical field, and the University is unique in that it allows students to conduct independent research in their first year as part of the SURF program. As a rising sophomore, I was in the lab doing what students at most other universities don't get to do until their junior year.

#### Why medicine?

I learned that it's not necessarily rare for medical professionals to misdiagnose. A lot of people aren't willing to admit that they don't

have all the answers. I am attracted to understudied topics where there is still much left to explore. That's a perspective I'm going to bring to my work as a clinical pathologist.

#### What value do you want to add to the world through this work?

There's an increasing number of emerging diseases, but efforts to collect data and apply knowledge aren't keeping pace. I want to help find treatments for rare conditions. I might pursue an M.D.–Ph.D. because, although I want to be a pathologist, I can't give up my love of research.

#### What about when you're not in the lab?

I'm in the final stage of creating a new student organization on campus. Once approved, I'll be the founder and president of the University's first TEDx chapter. I've always loved the entrepreneurial and leadership aspect of TED. Ultimately, I want members to produce their own talks on campus. It might be a little ambitious, but I can't wait. ■









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## AN ATHLETE AND A SCHOLAR

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“

*Receiving a scholarship from Coach meant more to me than he might have known at the time. I had been working my whole life to get to where I am now, and his support showed me that if I continue to push myself in everything I do, I will be rewarded. Now I have a new sense of home and of family. My teammates and I have bonds that can't be broken.*

Derrick  
Rowland '20





◆ **Derrick Rowland '20**, a marketing major, was awarded a full athletic scholarship as a result of a recommendation by the men's basketball coach, Ted Hotelling, who witnessed firsthand Rowland's dedication and work ethic. This past season, Rowland excelled academically as well as on the court and was named to both the NE10 Academic Honor Roll and the NE10 Honorable Mention All-Conference Team.



# The True Measure of Success

When people think about philanthropy, they often picture someone writing a check to support a cause. They might not think about the underlying desire, drive, and real effort that it takes to do this work.

I was probably fairly naive when I first started down this path, but my experience has taught me that philanthropy isn't any one thing. It's about finding where we can have the most impact and then becoming passionate about those issues as we learn more. It's continuous learning, listening, and adjusting.

We have a vision at the foundation: to offer people the opportunity to experience joy, to be healthy, and to have a voice in their own community. We want to enrich people's lives and, in turn, enrich society. That's how The Tow Foundation originally got into funding juvenile justice. We started doing deep research and inviting people in from all different areas of this very complex, intertwined system.

All of our philanthropy is grounded in that same vision. Are people hopeful? Do they see a future? Do they have the opportunity to enjoy culture, to become educated, and to feel secure in their physical and mental health? Do they have a forum to speak up and participate in their community in a way that makes them feel valued? If the answer is positive, then we know we have been successful.

When The University of New Haven worked with us to establish the Tow Youth Justice Institute (TYJI), its leadership showed dedication to becoming a hub for youth justice, policy practice, and leadership development. When I visit campus, I see this in real time. I was granted an honorary doctorate from the University in 2017, and I was blown away by the intellect, the enthusiasm, and the diversity of the graduating class. I also had the opportunity the prior year, as a presenter in the Bartels Lecture Series, to address an audience of students, faculty, administration, staff, and community members on the power of philanthropy to impact system change. I was impressed both by the questions they asked and by their different interests. I was excited in each of these instances to learn that these students were going to enter the field and become the leaders of tomorrow.

My advice for anyone striving to make a difference is to approach problems with curiosity and an open mind. Let go of your preconceived notions. Create opportunity for those doing the work to speak truthfully and listen to what they say. Without authentically engaging the people who are going to be most affected, philanthropy cannot influence lasting change. ■



## Emily Tow

Emily Tow is the president of The Tow Foundation, a charitable organization that supports work in the areas of justice reform, medical research, higher education, and the arts. The foundation is the primary funder for the Tow Youth Justice Institute (TYJI) at the Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences at the University of New Haven. TYJI is a resource to prepare the next generation of change agents through experiential education and leadership development, and to advise policy-makers and service providers through its role as the research partner to the State of Connecticut's Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee.

CATALYZE  
DREAM  
TRANSFORM  
INNOVATE  
EMPOWER  
IGNITE  
PARTNER  
REIMAGINE  
COLLABORATE  
DISRUPT  
CONNECT



# Q&A

## Nicholas Graham '16

**Nicholas Graham '16**, who majored in film production while an undergraduate at the University of New Haven, served as art production assistant on the set of the recently released Warner Brothers film "Joker." The film premiered at the 76th Venice International Film Festival on August 31, 2019, where it won the Golden Lion, the festival's most prestigious award. It was theatrically released in the United States on October 4. Graham is currently pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in cinema directing at Columbia College Chicago in addition to working at a Chicago-based advertising agency as an associate content producer.

### Did you always have a passion for film?

Movie nights with my family are some of my favorite memories. But as a kid, you think about the entertainment business and Hollywood and don't see that there is a real career opportunity there if you dedicate yourself to pursuing it.

### Was there anything that surprised you about your experience working as an art production assistant on the set of "Joker"?

It's interesting how, with just one phone call, everything in your life can change. When I got the offer, I had to immediately make the decision to move from Chicago to New York City for the next six months.

### Tell us more about how you came across this opportunity.

In the film industry, it's not only what you know, it's who you know. I was working in the art department of "Joker" on set as an assistant to the leadman, Tim Metzger. Tim is a fellow University of New Haven alumnus, and I appreciate his wanting to give back by giving me the chance to pursue my dream.

### What during your time at the University most inspired you?

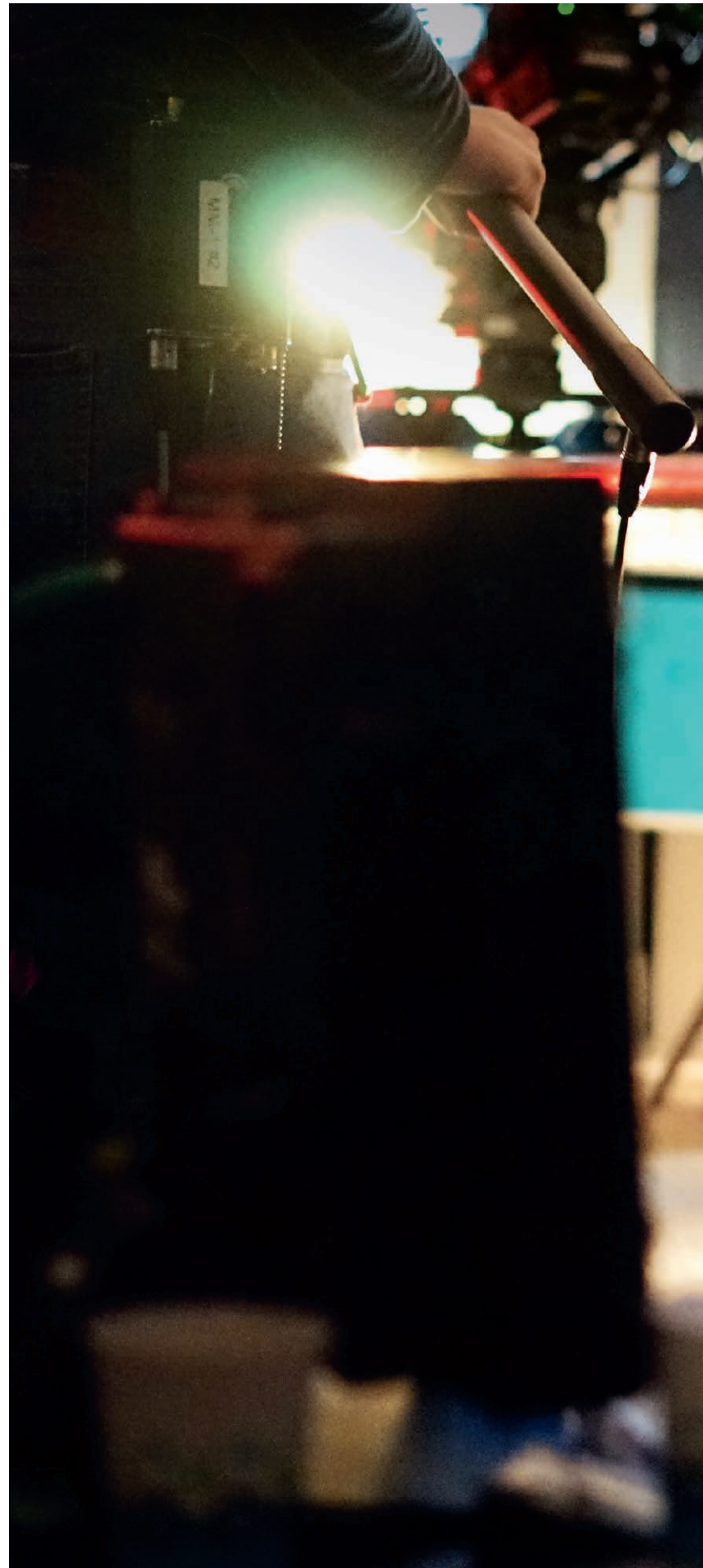
Our trip to the 2018 Cannes Film Festival was a defining moment. You're surrounded by all this flash and flare, and you see the end result of so much hard work. Everyone there was once where I am right now.

### What would you tell people looking to break into the film industry?

I would remind them that it is a business. People think that this is an art-driven field, and ultimately, the final product is about art. But it takes time. You can't sit around hoping it will happen.

### I imagine you must have been incredibly excited in advance of the release.

Even though I was such a small part of the film, I still feel like I left my mark. The little things I did, I tried to do creatively. When you see bags of trash on the screen, just know that a lot of thought went into how they're propped! ■









## A PILLAR OF THE COMMUNITY

📍 **Martin (Marty) O'Connor '76, M. Div., J.D.**, serves as the campus chaplain, faculty advisor for the President's Public Service Fellowship, and faculty member of the committee on community service at the University of New Haven. O'Connor also served in the New Haven Fire Department for thirty years and retired as chief of the department in 1998. He is a licensed attorney in Connecticut and an ordained deacon in the Archdiocese of Hartford.





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*This might sound cliché, but ever since I first set foot on this campus in the fall of 1972, I have felt like I was where I needed to be. This institution has provided me with measures of satisfaction, opportunity, and joy for which I will be forever grateful. I am passionate about giving back and doing anything I can to help the University and its students who have come to mean so much to me. This is the only place in the world where I, and these students, have the chance to do all of the great things we get to do.*

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**Martin  
O'Connor '76,  
M. Div., J.D.**



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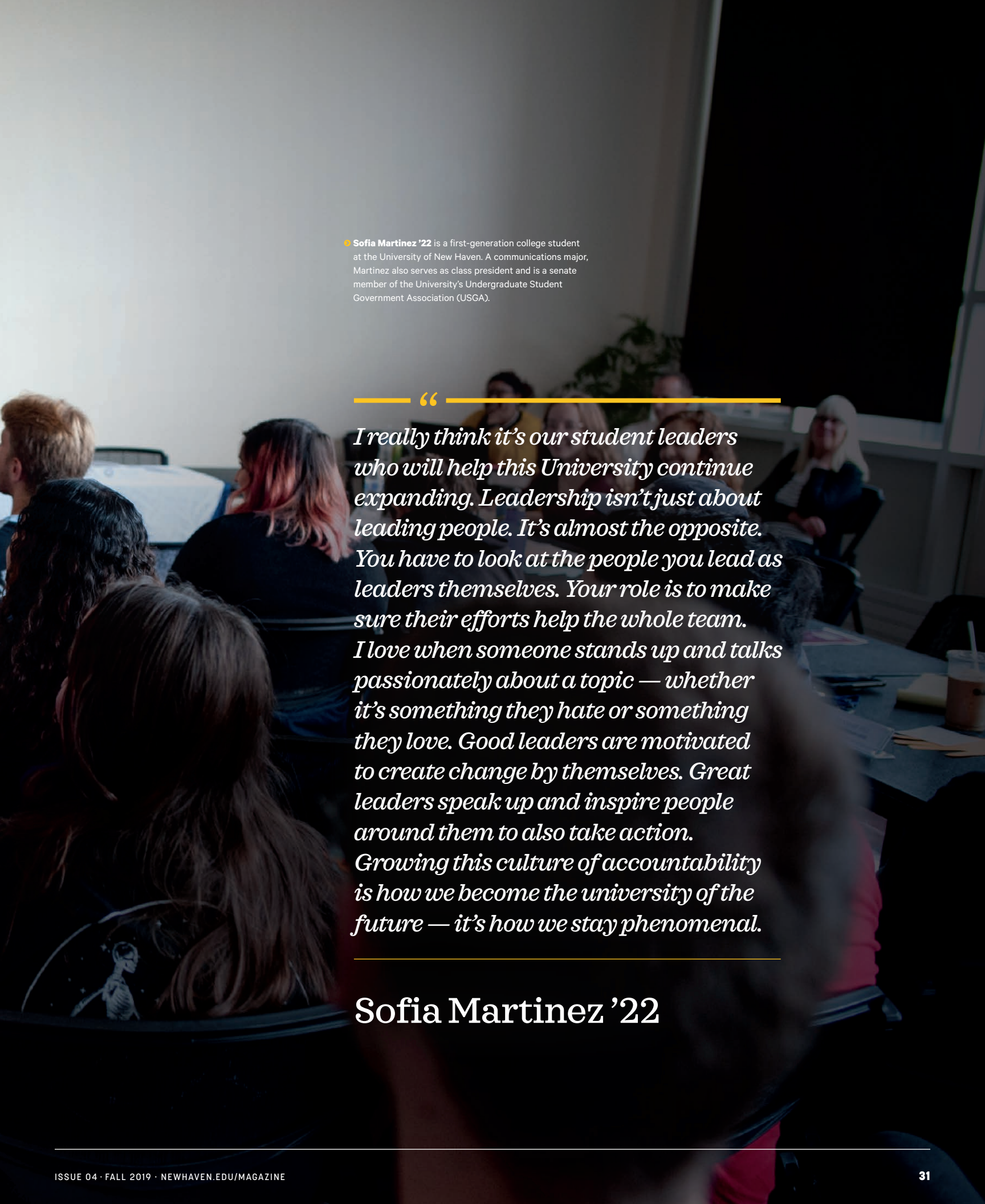
## LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

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Photo by Defining Studios





● **Sofia Martinez '22** is a first-generation college student at the University of New Haven. A communications major, Martinez also serves as class president and is a senate member of the University's Undergraduate Student Government Association (USGA).

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*I really think it's our student leaders who will help this University continue expanding. Leadership isn't just about leading people. It's almost the opposite. You have to look at the people you lead as leaders themselves. Your role is to make sure their efforts help the whole team. I love when someone stands up and talks passionately about a topic — whether it's something they hate or something they love. Good leaders are motivated to create change by themselves. Great leaders speak up and inspire people around them to also take action. Growing this culture of accountability is how we become the university of the future — it's how we stay phenomenal.*

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**Sofia Martinez '22**



# Building for Success







# A Campus for Decades to Come

• Having expanded its footprint significantly since it was established as a small university on a hill in 1960, (highlighted here — the single, original University building, now Maxcy Hall), the University of New Haven boasts an 82-acre main campus overlooking historic downtown New Haven and Long Island Sound. This expansion is the result of a robust investment in new construction and technology, \$300 million of which was allocated in the past decade alone. Additionally, the University has satellite campuses in Orange, Connecticut; New London, Connecticut; and Prato, Italy. This growth represents the institution's commitment to creating a community and physical environment that embodies the dreams and ambitions of its students.





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